



**U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Texas**

Johnny Sutton, U.S. Attorney

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Shana Jones, Special Assistant
Daryl Fields, Public Information Officer
(210) 384-7452

FIFTEEN CHARGED IN OPERATION EMERALD HIGHWAY

United States Attorney Johnny Sutton and Drug Enforcement Administration Resident Agent in Charge Kenneth E. Miller announced this afternoon the arrests of and charges against 14 West Texas residents on federal drug charges. The indictment is the result of a joint seven-month Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation conducted by the Drug Enforcement Administration High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Task Force in Alpine. Arrests were made this morning in Odessa, Midland and Presidio.

Those arrested today include: Jesus Jose Tavaréz of Presidio, Pedro Jose Juárez of Odessa, Elaynn Mora-Lujan of Odessa, Dorcas Enriqueta Callahan of Odessa, Thomas Jacob Bull of Odessa, Monica Landra Chavez of Odessa, Krista Ann Cuellar of Odessa, Alondra Tercero Hernandez, Jose Miguel Castro of Goldsmith, Texas and Manuel Anthony Barrera of Odessa. Four defendants, all of whom are from Odessa, were already in custody prior to today. They are: Ariel Aurelio Lujan, Rendi Renee Lajaunie, Gary Arreola, and Yvonne Lynette White-Perez.

Hernandez, Castro and Barrera are charged by criminal complaint with conspiracy to possess with the intent to distribute over 100 kilograms of marijuana and conspiracy to commit money laundering. The remaining defendants were charged by federal grand jury indictment returned in Pecos, Texas, on June 28, 2005, with conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute between 100 kilograms and 1,000 kilograms of marijuana. Upon conviction of the drug conspiracy charge, each defendant faces between five and 40 years in federal prison. In addition, Lujan, Juárez, Lajaunie, Callahan and Chavez were indicted on a charge of conspiracy to commit money laundering. Upon conviction of the money laundering conspiracy charge, each defendant faces up to 20 years in federal prison.

According to the indictment, these defendants allegedly are part of an organization which imported and distributed marijuana from Ojinaga, Chihuahua, Mexico to the Midland-Odessa area. The organization utilized various methods to carry out their operation including having individuals back pack the marijuana from Mexico to such locations as the Valentine, Texas, area where others in the organization would retrieve the marijuana and transport it to the Midland-Odessa area for street level distribution. The investigation also revealed that the organization used Western Union wire transfers to launder the profits of their drug distribution efforts and subsequently, used those funds to further their illegal operation. In addition to cash, the organization would receive vehicles—some stolen—for payment of marijuana loads.

The Drug Enforcement Administration High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Task Force in Alpine includes investigators from the Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Marshal's Service, West Texas Narcotics Enforcement Task Force; Texas Department of Public Safety, Odessa Police Department, Midland Police Department; Midland County Sheriff's Office, and Alpine Police Department. This case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Jay Miller.

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An indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent unless and until convicted through due process of law.

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